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FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5827
INFO RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
RUCPDOG/USDOC WASHDC
RUEHDO/AMEMBASSY DOHA 1514
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI 9259
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE 5075
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR 3782

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SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [ECPS](#) [EINT](#) [KPAO](#) [PK](#)
SUBJECT: PTA ON THE YOUTUBE BLOCKING INCIDENT

REF: A) ISLAMABAD 806 B) ISLAMABAD 856 C) EMAILS BETWEEN AHOLMAN,
FASAEED AND MSELLINGER FEBRUARY 27 AND 29, 2008

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: In response to an informal request from the Department, EconCouns and Econoff met with Pakistan Telecommunications Authority (PTA) Chairman Shahzad Alam Malik March 5 to discuss the February 22 blockage of YouTube. Malik explained that the Pakistan Telecommunications Authority (PTA) instructed Pakistani Internet service providers (ISPs) to block access to the "YouTube" video-sharing website (Ref A) because of "objectionable content." Subsequently, a technical error caused a global blackout of YouTube.com. The technical error was remedied and YouTube.com was restored internationally; PTA then said the objectionable material on YouTube had been removed, and the site is no longer blocked in Pakistan. The PTA welcomed an offer of technical training by the U.S. Telecommunications Training Institute. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On March 5, 2008, EconCouns and Econoff met with Shahzad Alam Malik, Chairman of the Pakistan Telecommunications Authority, to discuss the events surrounding the blackout of the YouTube website. Chairman Malik explained the decision-making process that led to the order to ISPs to block YouTube. An inter-ministerial committee comprising the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Information, the PTA, and chaired by the Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunications was called to discuss the proposed blocking of a site on maintenance of public order grounds.

¶3. (SBU) Chairman Malik said that the PTA generally opposes the blocking of any website. In the case of YouTube, there was material deemed offensive to Islam on the site (possibly a trailer of the anti-Islamic Dutch video that is expected to be released later in March). The committee as a whole feared a repeat of violence and destruction of property that occurred after publication of cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad in a Danish newspaper in 2006. A consensus was reached to block YouTube within Pakistan in order to prevent a repeat of such violence.

¶3. (SBU) Chairman Malik said that the next step was to inform the ISPs. Unfortunately, a technical error occurred after the ISPs began to block the YouTube domain. This technical error resulted in a temporary global blackout of the site. He provided a copy of the PTA's investigation report about the incident. According to the report, PTCL, Pakistan's largest ISP, blocked the YouTube site within its own domain using Border Gateway Protocol (BGP). PTCL has been using BGP with upstream providers since 2001 without incident. In this case, PCCW, a large ISP in Hong Kong, was the only upstream provider affected by PTCL's actions. When the problem was discovered, PTCL was able to remedy it within their own domain. The report also stated that PTCL is willing to analyze PCCW and YouTube snapshots of the incident to better understand what happened.

¶4. (SBU) Econoff presented a proposal for technical training in

Internet infrastructure configuration and management offered by the U.S. Telecommunications Training Institute (USTTI). USTTI training will be helpful in preventing future technical errors that could have a worldwide impact. Chairman Malik is familiar with USTTI and welcomed the offer of training. Post is working with the PTA on nominees.

15. (SBU) COMMENT: The global outage of the YouTube website appears to have been a genuine technical error and not a deliberate attempt by the GOP to shut down YouTube worldwide. The technical error was quickly remedied and the site was available again internationally within hours. According to Pakistani authorities, YouTube voluntarily removed offensive content, and YouTube.com is once again available to the Pakistani public. The content considered offensive was not enumerated in the meeting with Chairman Malik, nor is it clear what content YouTube specifically removed from their site. Rumors have circulated in the press that objectionable content actually may have included videos of vote rigging as well as videos unflattering to President Musharraf and other prominent politicians. End comment.

PATTERSON